STARBLAZER

SPACE FICTION ADVENTURE IN PICTURES No. 141

22p

THE LONE EARTHMAN MUST DEFEAT THE GIANT ALIEN WARRIOR IN ORDER TO COMPLETE HIS MISSION, OTHERWISE THE GALAXY IS DOOMED . . .

SPACEROAMER

STARBLAZER

FROM THEIR HOMEWORLD OF ARENAM IN THE CENTRE OF THE GALAXY, THE NAMA RULED THE MILKY WAY. IN THEIR ORGANIC SHIPS THEY CRUISED THE STARS, INDIFFERENT TO THE VICE AND MISERY THAT FOLLOWED THEIR PROGRESS, INTRUDING ARROGANTLY WHEREVER THEY WISHED. ONLY THE TERRAN COMMONWEALTH OF PLANETS REMAINED ANYTHING LIKE HONEST IN A CORRUPT GALAXY—BUT THEY KNEW THAT ONE DAY THE NAMA WOULD THRUST INTO THEIR AFFAIRS, DESTROYING FOREVER THE PAIN-STAKING ATTEMPTS TO MAINTAIN AN INDEPENDENT SYSTEM BASED ON TRUST. LIFE WENT ON AS PEOPLE PONDERED THE AWESOME PROBLEM.

SPACEROAMER

INSIDE THE SMALLER FRIGATE THAD YALTIS, ALIAS SPACEROAMER, A CRUEL, BARBARIC EARTHMAN, FOUGHT DESPERATELY—
HIS BLASTER'S EMPTY— WE'VE GOT HIM!
YOU THINK SO!
A CONCEALED ATOMIC DISRUPTOR BEAM SUDDENLY SPAT FROM THAD'S CUTLASS.
SURPRISE! AND NOW TO QUIT THIS SINKING WRECK!

TEN YEARS PREVIOUSLY THAD HAD BEEN CASHIERED FROM THE TERRAN NAVY FOR CRUELTY IN A WAR WHERE ATROCITIES OCCURRED DAILY. WITH HIS " FREEDOM " HE ESTABLISHED A REGIME THAT TOOK WHAT IT WANTED FROM WHOM IT WANTED.

THAD HAD ONE GREAT TALENT: HE WAS A MELANOMORPH—ABLE TO CHANGE THE COLOUR OF SKIN, HAIR OR EYES AT WILL. NO DESCRIPTION OR PICTURE OF HIM COULD EVER CLAIM TO BE ACCURATE.
WHICH THIS TIME, I WONDER? GORAXIAN? REMAIN HUMAN?

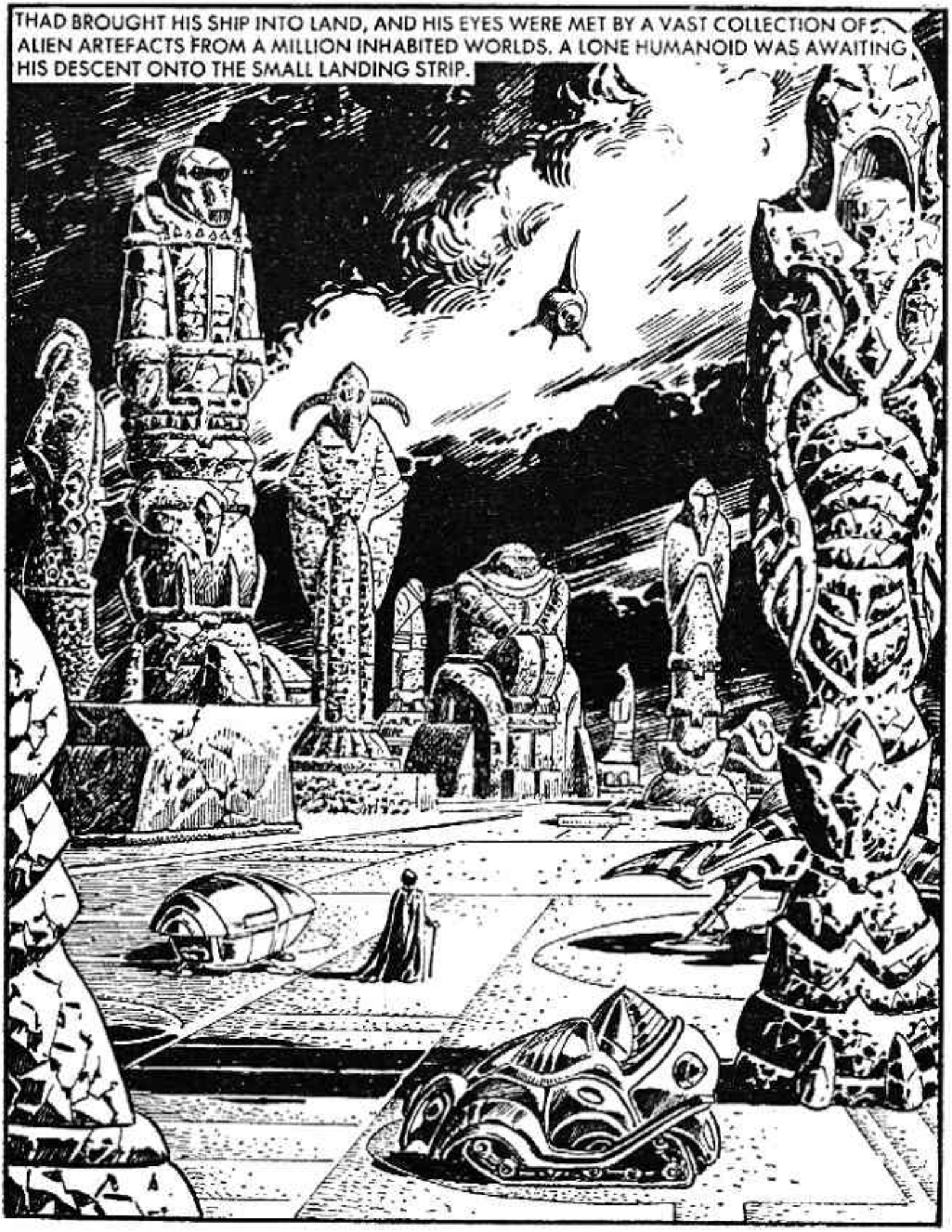
BUT AN ATTACKING MISSILE HALTED SPACEROAMER'S THOUGHTS.
FIRES OF BARAN! IT'S IMPOSSIBLE— WHO KNOWS I'M HERE?

BUT DESPITE ALL THE PIRATE'S BEST MANOEUVRES, THE PROJECTILE STRUCK HOME.

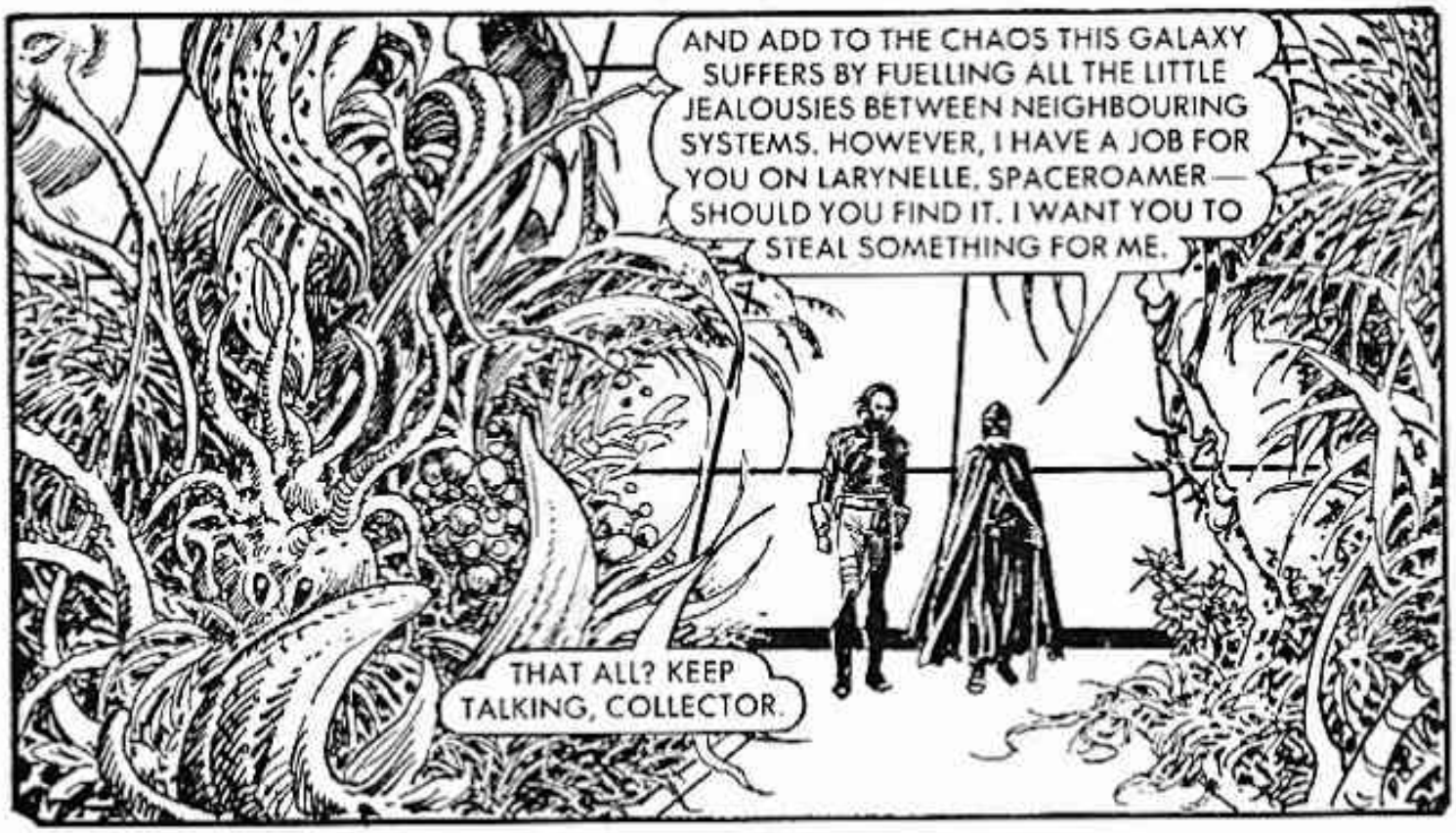
THE MISSILE CAUSED LITTLE REAL DAMAGE, BECAUSE IT WAS A PROBE, AND WHEN HE GOT WITHIN THREE PACES—
YOU ARE THAD YALTIS, EARTHMAN? KNOWN AS SPACEROAMER?
THAT'S ME! HOW DID YOU FIND ME?
I HAVE YOUR BRAIN PATTERNS ON RECORD. WHEREVER YOU ARE IN SPACE, I CAN FIND YOU. YOU ARE INSTRUCTED TO VISIT THE COLLECTOR; THE CO-ORDINATES HAVE ALREADY BEEN FED INTO YOUR SHIP'S NAVI-COMP.
THE COLLECTOR? I THOUGHT HE WAS JUST AN OLD SPACEMEN'S TALE. WHAT'S HE WANT ME FOR?
BUT THE PROBE COLLAPSED INTO DUST WITHOUT ANSWER.

WELL, I'M INTRIGUED NOW—BUT IT DOESN'T SEEM LIKE I'VE GOT MUCH CHOICE. THE COLLECTOR IT IS.

THE COLLECTOR'S HOMEWORLD BEYOND THE GALACTIC SPIRAL WAS THE SOLE PLANET OF AN AGEING SUN, A BLUE AND GREY WORLD HOVERING IN PERPETUAL TWILIGHT.


THAD BROUGHT HIS SHIP INTO LAND, AND HIS EYES WERE MET BY A VAST COLLECTION OF ALIEN ARTEFACTS FROM A MILLION INHABITED WORLDS. A LONE HUMANOID WAS AWAITING HIS DESCENT ONTO THE SMALL LANDING STRIP.

THEY MOUNTED THE TRANSPORT AND SHOT OFF THROUGH A BIZARRE LANDSCAPE OF COLLECTED ITEMS.
YOU'VE HEARD OF THE ARTIFICERS OF LARYNELLE, I TAKE IT?
WHO HASN'T? THEY KEEP DEVELOPING NEW GADGETS AND HANDING THEM OUT TO STAR-SYSTEMS FOR NO APPARENT REASON, THOUGH THEY MANAGE TO KEEP THEMSELVES WELL-HIDDEN FROM THE REST OF THE GALAXY—EVEN THE NAMA.


AND ADD TO THE CHAOS THIS GALAXY SUFFERS BY FUELLING ALL THE LITTLE JEALOUSIES BETWEEN NEIGHBOURING SYSTEMS. HOWEVER, I HAVE A JOB FOR YOU ON LARYNELLE, SPACEROAMER—SHOULD YOU FIND IT. I WANT YOU TO STEAL SOMETHING FOR ME.
THAT ALL? KEEP TALKING, COLLECTOR.

THEIR LATEST LITTLE DEVICE IS GOING TO BE GIVEN TO THE NAMA, WHICH MAY BE SCRUPULOUSLY FAIR, BUT SHEER MADNESS. I WANT THAT DEVICE.
AND WHAT DO I GET OUT OF THIS?

YOU'RE AN EARTHMAN, SPACEROAMER—DOESN'T IT BOTHER YOU THAT ONE DAY THE NAMA WILL JUST DRIFT INTO THE TERRAN COMMONWEALTH, PLUNDER WHATEVER THEY WANT AND THEN GO—LEAVING EVERYTHING IN THE SAME CHAOS THEY'VE BEQUEATHED THE REST OF THE GALAXY?
NO! EARTH DESERTED ME A LONG TIME AGO, COLLECTOR, I OWE THEM NOTHING. SO WHAT IS THIS THING YOU WANT, AND WHAT'S MY CUT?

IT'S AN ARTIFICIAL BLACK HOLE, COMPLETELY CONTAINED AND WEIGHTLESS IN A STASIS BOX. I'M SURE YOU CAN APPRECIATE THE POWER LOCKED UP IN THAT. I WANT THAT, BUT YOU CAN HAVE ANYTHING ELSE YOU CAN MANAGE TO STEAL.
IT IS INTERESTING! YES—A DEAL.

AND SO THE PIRATE LEFT ON HIS MISSION, UNAWARE OF THE TAILING SHIP—
THERE YOU ARE AT LAST, YALTIS! IT'S BEEN TOO LONG SINCE I LOST YOUR TRAIL AT PRIMA GARDA.
THE SPEAKER WAS BYROSS WHO HAILED FORM IMPERIA GALBRANI, A SYSTEM FAR AWAY IN A DISTANT SPIRAL ARM. HE HAD LEFT HOME THIRTY STANDARD YEARS PREVIOUSLY WHEN HE BECAME A BOUNTY-HUNTER. YALTIS HAD CROSSED HIM MANY TIMES.

THAD MADE STRAIGHT FOR THE GORAXIAN WORLDS—A SPRAWL OF THREE PLANETARY SYSTEMS ON THE GALACTIC RIM. BUT ONLY ONE PLANET INTERESTED HIM—A BARREN SPHERE OF ROCK NAMED KALIBAN.
HERE COME THE MONITORS. HOPE THIS CRATE'S UP TO IT.

DEVELOPED FROM A PAST GIFT OF THE ARTIFICERS, THE GORAXIAN MONITOR-SHIPS WERE UNSTOPPABLE MACHINES OF DESTRUCTION, GUIDED BY A COMPUTER-MIND DEEP IN THEIR ARMOURED CORE.

UNKNOWN SHIP: YOU ARE REQUESTED TO HEAVE-TO AND IDENTIFY. FAILURE TO DO SO WILL RESULT IN YOUR TERMINATION. PLEASE ACKNOWLEDGE.

NO DICE, I'M COMING THROUGH!

THERE WAS AN EXCHANGE OF FIRE, BUT TO NO EFFECT. THAD'S SHIP MADE IT PAST THE MONITORS—ONLY TO HAVE THEM TURN ABOUT AND PURSUE HIM.

BARAN'S FLAMES! THEY'RE QUICKER THAN I THOUGHT!

IN SECONDS, THAD WAS OVERTAKEN AND HIS SMALL SHIP HAMMERED MERCILESSLY WITH ATOM BLASTS.
I'LL BE FINISHED IF I DON'T GET OUT SOON.
COMPARATIVELY SAFE IN HIS ANTI-HEAT! COCOON HE WEAVED HIS DAMAGED SHIP FRANTICALLY—
MADE IT! AND HERE'S A PARTING GIFT FOR YOU! NOW I JUST HOPE I CAN MAKE IT TO KALIBAN.
COME ON, BABY, DON'T GIVE UP ON ME NOW!
NURSING HIS SHIP ALL THE WAY, THE PIRATE FINALLY REACHED KALBIAN AND BEGAN THE DANGEROUS DESCENT.

SEVERAL YEARS BEFORE, THAD HAD SAILED WITH ANOTHER TERRAN PIRATE, CAPTAIN MYGAN. AFTER ONE BRIEF SORTIE, A RENEGADE NAMA, ARULL, HAD BEEN MAROONED ON KALIBAN.

THAD'S DISGUISE WAS PERFECT—
HELLO, ARULL. IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME.
CAPTAIN MYGAN! HAVE YOU COME TO TAKE ME BACK?

THAT I HAVE, ARULL. BUT FIRST YOU'VE GOT TO BE HONEST WITH ME.
ANYTHING, CAPTAIN! YOU KNOW THAT!

YOU REALLY DID FIND LARYNELLE, DIDN'T YOU? YOU SWORE YOU HADN'T—BUT WE ALL KNEW YOU'D STOLEN THE MOEBIUS DISPERSER FROM THE ARTIFICERS. NOW TELL ME—WHERE IS LARYNELLE?

YES, CAPTAIN—I FOUND THEM. THE PLANET'S HIDDEN AMONGST A PULSAR CLUSTER AT THE VERY HEART OF THE GALAXY. RIGHT UNDER THE NAMA'S NOSE.

AND THE MOEBIUS DISPERSER?
HERE, CAPTAIN. I NEVER DID FIGURE OUT HOW TO WORK IT.

AND YOU NEVER WILL!
NOW TO LEAVE THIS MISERABLE DUMP. FERISSA'S THE NEAREST POPULATED PLANET.
THE MOEBIUS DISPERSER HUMMED SOFTLY FOR A MOMENT . . .

. . . AND THAD WAS TRANSPORTED TO FERISSA IN A MOMENT. THE MOEBIUS DISPERSER WAS A SHORT RANGE MOLECULAR TRANSPORTER NAMED AFTER ITS INVENTOR WHO EVENTUALLY DIDN'T REMATERIALISE.
GOOD THING ARULL DIDN'T WORK OUT HOW TO USE THIS.

CASUALLY, THAD TURNED INTO AN ALLEYWAY — ONLY TO MEET THE BOUNTY-HUNTER FROM IMPERIA GALBRANI.

BYROSS! YOU AGAIN?

DON'T MOVE A MUSCLE, YALTIS! I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU TO SHOW UP.

HOW DID YOU FIND ME?

A BRAIN-WAVE DETECTOR. I LOST YOU AFTER THE TWO MONITOR SHIPS SO I JUST WAITED HERE UNTIL YOUR ALPHA-PATTERN SHOWED UP ON THE MONITOR. NOW WE'LL JUST TAKE A LITTLE WALK TO THE SPACEPORT.

UNSEEN BY THE BOUNTY-HUNTER, THAD'S FINGERS FOUND THE DISPERSER'S CONTROL BUTTONS.

THAD MOVED HIMSELF THROUGH SPACE TO JUST BEHIND BYROSS.
ONLY BYROSS' LIGHTNING REFLEXES SAVED HIS LIFE.
I WON'T MISS NEXT TIME, GALBRANI TROUBLE-MAKER!

BUT BEFORE THAD COULD FIRE AGAIN, THE BOUNTY-HUNTER RETALIATED, AND THE MOEBUS DISPERSER WAS DESTROYED.
NO MORE VANISHING TRICKS, YALTIS!
BLAST YOU!
THAD SUMMONED AN ANTI-GRAV DISC, THE LOCAL PUBLIC TRANSPORT ON FERISSA, WITH A BRIEF MENTAL COMMAND.
THIS DOESN'T END IT, BYROSS! NEXT TIME I WON'T BE IN A HURRY!
I'LL BE WAITING, SPACEROAMER!
BUT UP IN SPACE WAS ANOTHER SETBACK. AN INVASION FLEET FROM THE PAROVINN REPUBLICS WERE SET TO HINDER HIM. THE FINAL COLLAPSE OF TALKS OVER TRADING RIGHTS BETWEEN PAROVINN AND THE GORAXIAN WORLDS HAD SIGNALLED THE ARMED INVASION OF FERISSA AND MANY OTHER GORAXIAN-HELD PLANETS.

WITH TERRIBLE EASE, THE PAROVINN INVADERS LANDED BY THE SPACEPORT, AND THEIR DEADLY ASSAULT BEGAN IN EARNEST.

AND INEVITABLY, THAD WAS SOON IN THE THICK OF THE FIGHTING.
FIRES OF BARAN! WHAT NOW?
BY A MIRACLE HE SAVED HIMSELF AS THE ANTI-GRAV DISC FELL TO EARTH —
THIS CALLS FOR DRASTIC ACTION.

AS HE DROPPED TO THE GROUND, THAD'S SKIN DARKENED AND HIS HAIR AND EYES WENT WHITE. HE SPOTTED A SMALL NUMBER OF NATIVE SOLDIERS AGAINST A FAR WALL.

I SHOULD PASS FOR A LOCAL NOW. AND THERE'S MY TICKET OUT OF HERE.

AFFECTING AN AIR OF COMMAND, THAD RAN TO THE SOLDIERS.

YOU MEN, FOLLOW ME! WE'VE GOT TO ORGANISE AERIAL RESISTANCE FROM THE SPACEPORT.

YES, SIR.

WITH THE SOLDIERS' HELP, THAD FOUGHT HIS WAY TO THE SPACEPORT.

THREE OF YOU FOLLOW ME, THE REST COVER US. WE'LL TRY AND MAKE IT TO THE NEAREST ARMED SHIP!

SIR!

GUNNING THE STARSHIP'S ENGINES INTO LIFE, THAD BLASTED OFF HEEDLESSLY.
I THINK I'LL JUST LEAVE THOSE PAROVINN SOMETHING TO REMEMBER ME BY!
THE STARSHIP'S BAYS WERE FULLY-LADEN WITH PHOTON BOMBS. AS HE ROSE UP INTO FERISSA'S ATMOSPHERE, THAD DROPPED THEM ONTO THE SPACEPORT BELOW.
GOODBYE, FERISSA! TELL THEM SPACEROAMER WAS HERE!

AND NOW FOR LARYNELLE. PITY ABOUT THE COURSE I'LL HAVE TO TAKE, THOUGH.
BUT UNKNOWN TO THE PIRATE, ALIEN EYES STILL WATCHED HIS PROGRESS WITH KEEN INTEREST.
SO IT'S THE GALACTIC CENTRE YOU'RE OFF TO, EH, YALTIS? INTERESTING. THAT'LL TAKE YOU STRAIGHT THROUGH THE TERRAN COMMONWEALTH. I WONDER IF THEY'D LIKE TO PREPARE A SUITABLE WELCOME.
SMALLER AND SWIFTER THAN THE GORAXIAN STARSHIP, THE BOUNTY-HUNTER'S SCOUT STREAKED THROUGH SPACE TO A SIMILAR DESTINATION — EARTH, CENTRE OF THE COMMONWEALTH.

HYPER-DRIVING AT RECKLESS SPEED, BYROSS REACHED EARTH AND THE NERVE CENTRE OF THE COMMONWEALTH, THE VAST CITY OF BRYTAN.

QUICKLY, BYROSS WAS USHERED BEFORE THE HEAD OF TERRAN INTELLIGENCE: COMMANDER ROJ KALLEN.

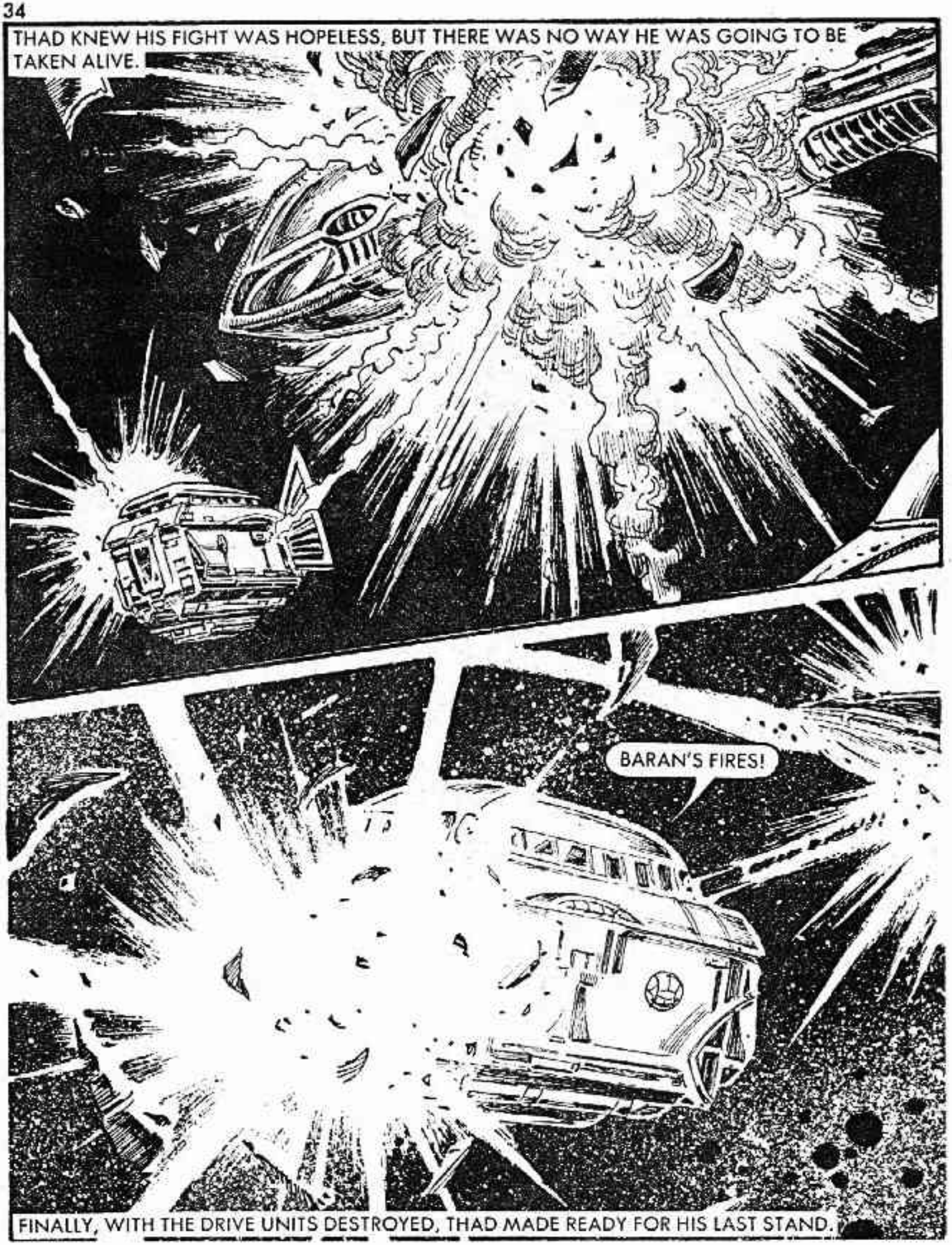
AND YOU SAY YALTIS WILL BE FLYING THROUGH THE TERRAN COMMONWEALTH?

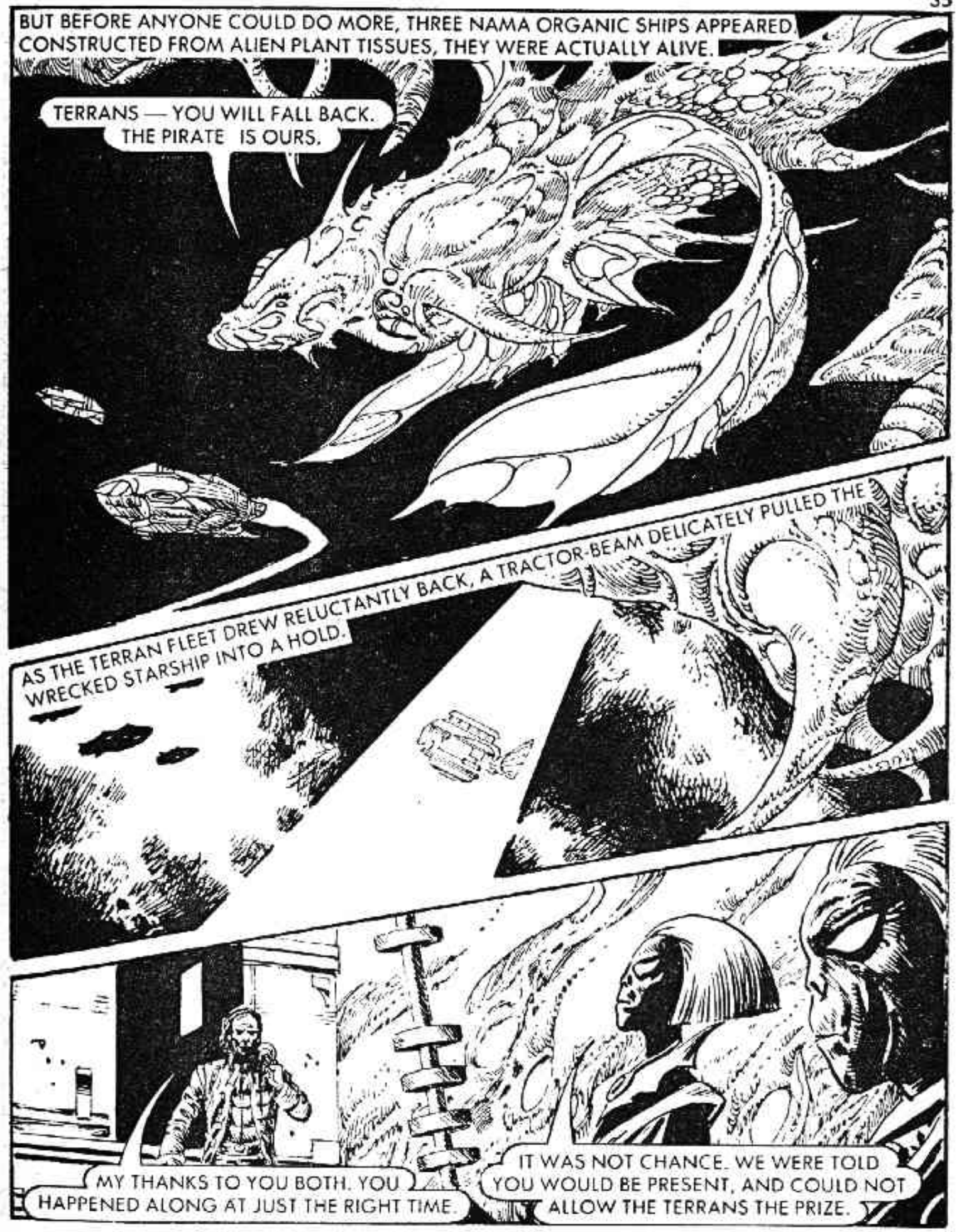
HE'LL HAVE TO, COMMANDER, OR WASTE TIME GOING ROUND. AND WHATEVER HE'S UP TO, IT DOESN'T SEEM AS THOUGH IT CAN WAIT.

THEN WE'LL HAVE TO MAKE HIM WELCOME, WON'T WE?
A SQUADRON OF NAVY SHIPS LIFTED OFF, ACCOMPANIED BY BYROSS.
AND, AS THAD ENTERED TERRAN SPACE . . .
I'LL BET IT'S THAT BOUNTY-HUNTER.
THAD YALTIS — YOU ARE SURROUNDED. GIVE YOURSELF UP!

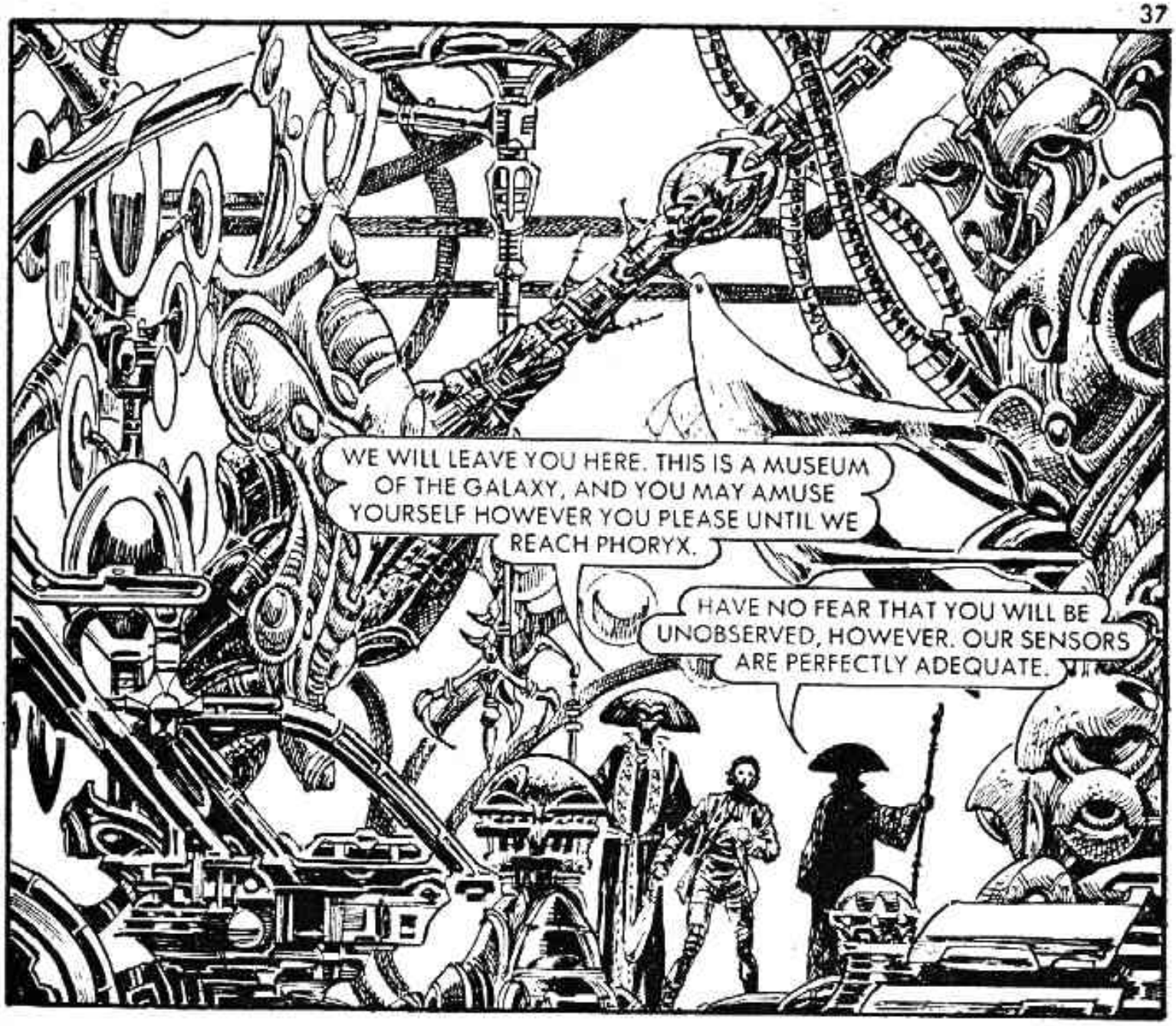
GIVE UP? I'VE FOUGHT OFF AN ENTIRE INVASION FLEET BEFORE NOW! YOU WON'T STOP ME!
THAD FIRED OFF ALL THE STARSHIP'S AUTO-CANNONS IN A DEADLY SALVO.

INSTANTLY, BATTLE COMMENCED.
DON'T BE A FOOL, YALTIS! GIVE IT UP!
NEVER!

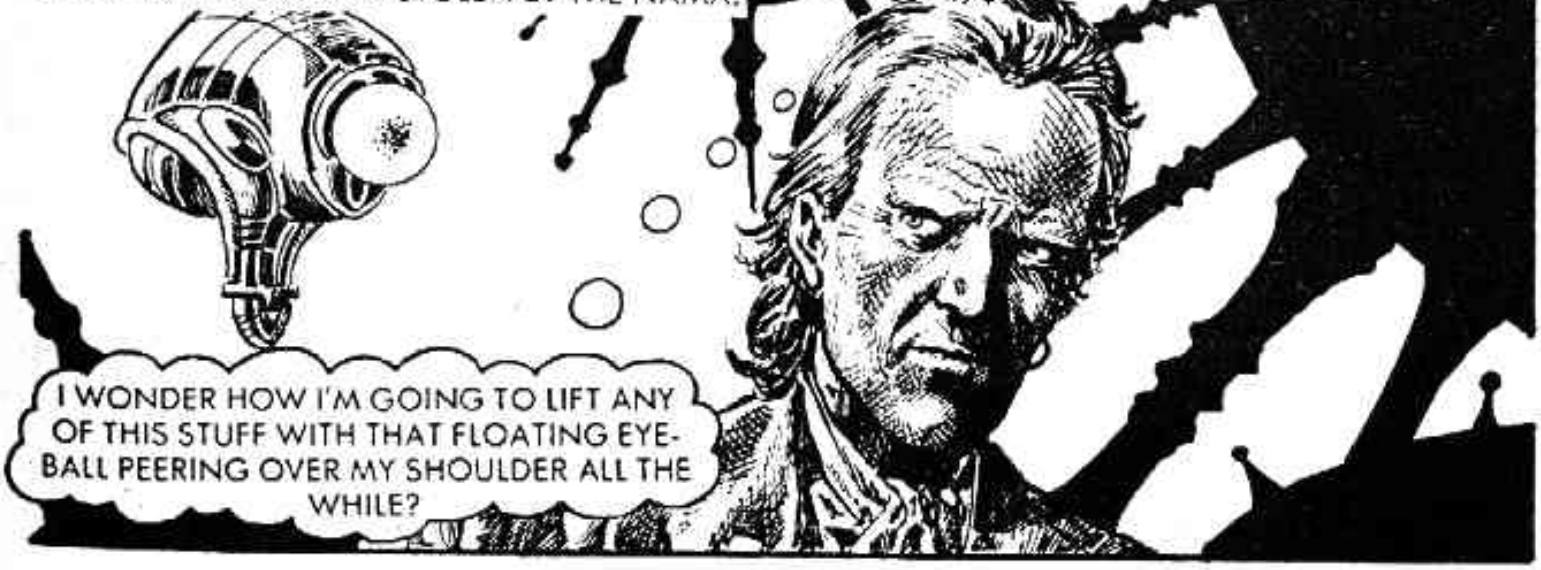

THAD KNEW HIS FIGHT WAS HOPELESS, BUT THERE WAS NO WAY HE WAS GOING TO BE TAKEN ALIVE.
BARAN'S FIRES!
FINALLY, WITH THE DRIVE UNITS DESTROYED, THAD MADE READY FOR HIS LAST STAND.


BUT BEFORE ANYONE COULD DO MORE, THREE NAMA ORGANIC SHIPS APPEARED. CONSTRUCTED FROM ALIEN PLANT TISSUES, THEY WERE ACTUALLY ALIVE.
TERRANS — YOU WILL FALL BACK. THE PIRATE IS OURS.
AS THE TERRAN FLEET DREW RELUCTANTLY BACK, A TRACTOR-BEAM DELICATELY PULLED THE WRECKED STARSHIP INTO A HOLD.
MY THANKS TO YOU BOTH. YOU HAPPENED ALONG AT JUST THE RIGHT TIME.
IT WAS NOT CHANCE. WE WERE TOLD YOU WOULD BE PRESENT, AND COULD NOT ALLOW THE TERRANS THE PRIZE.

WE SHALL NOW RETURN TO PHORYX, OUR HOMEWORLD.
GOOD! THAT SUITS ME JUST FINE.
THE ORGANIC MATERIAL OF THE SHIP PRODUCED OXYGEN JUST LIKE ANY PLANT, AND EVEN THE WALLS GREW BACTERIA THAT GAVE OFF ALL THE LIGHT NEEDED.



ONCE LEFT ALONE, NIGHTROAMER MOVED STRAIGHT TO A DISPLAY OF DEVICES GIVEN BY THE ARTIFICERS AND STOLEN BY THE NAMA.



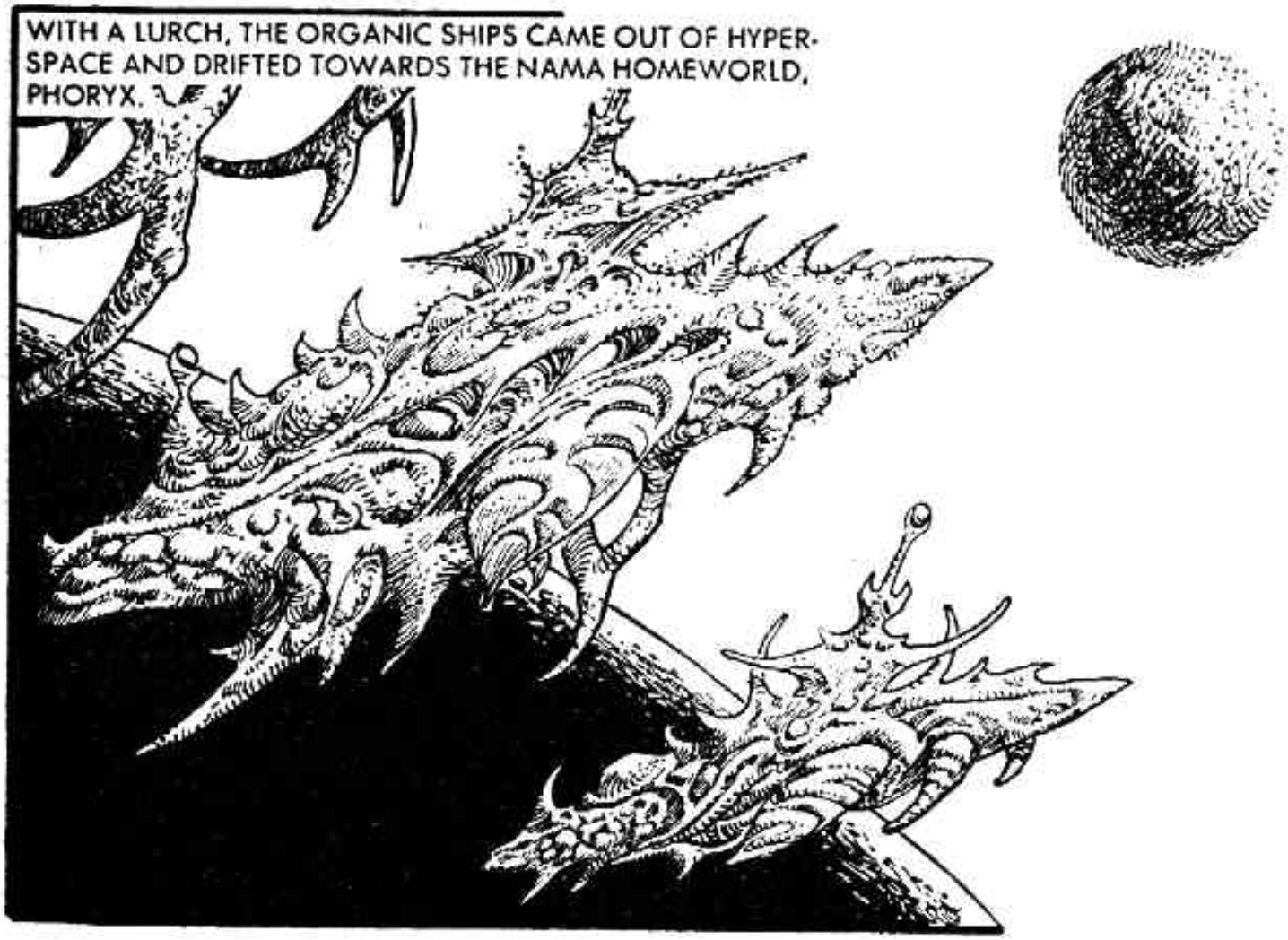
ONE MALFUNCTION — COMING RIGHT UP!
HE DIPPED INTO HIS POCKET, AND PULLED OUT A SMALL BAR MAGNET.
THAD TOSSED THE MAGNET AND THE CAMERA WENT HAYWIRE.
MALFUNCTION IN MUSEUM VIEWER 87-DX. I'VE LOST THE TERRAN PIRATE.
DISCONNECT. ENGAGE VIEWER 94-YL AND SONAR VX-117.

TERRAN BACK ON SCREEN.
GOOD! HE DOESN'T SEEM TO HAVE DONE ANYTHING IN THE MEANTIME.

BUT HE HAD! SOME SMALLER ITEMS HAD BEEN TAKEN AND NOW LAY IN HIS BAG.
A PHOTON MAGNET, HYPERWAVE TRANSCEIVER, TACHYONIC DRIVE UNIT AND THREE SMALL MASS CONVERTORS. THAT SHOULD PROVIDE ENOUGH INSURANCE, I THINK.

THAD REACHED A DISPLAY OF GALACTIC LIFE-FORMS, AND NOTICED THAT THERE WAS NO TERRAN. A SMALL ALIEN JOINED THEM — THE CURATOR.
GREETINGS, HUMAN, ARE YOU SURVEYING YOUR FUTURE HOME?

HOME?
CERTAINLY! ONCE WE REACH PHORYX, THE NAMA WILL DISSECT YOU TO SEE WHAT MAKES YOU WHAT YOU ARE. YOUR BODY WILL BE LEFT IN THERE, IN STASIS, FOR THEIR PLEASURE. OF COURSE, I'LL TEND YOU WELL . . .


WITH A LURCH, THE ORGANIC SHIPS CAME OUT OF HYPER-SPACE AND DRIFTED TOWARDS THE NAMA HOMEWORLD, PHORYX.

AN ANTI-GRAV CELL MATERIALISED AROUND THAD.

HEY! WHAT'S THIS?

BE CALM, HUMAN. THIS IS MERELY A PRECAUTION AS WE TRANSPORT DOWN TO PHORYX.

THEY ENTERED AN ODDLY-DESIGNED SHUTTLE AND STREAKED AWAY TOWARDS THE NAMA HOMEWORLD.

IN MOMENTS, THAD WAS TRANSFERRED FROM THE SHUTTLE TO A NAMA CONTAINMENT AREA WHERE THE ALIENS DISCUSSED HIS FATE.

I THINK MORE SUITABLE CLOTHES FOR THE HUMAN WOULD BE APPROPRIATE.

I AGREE.

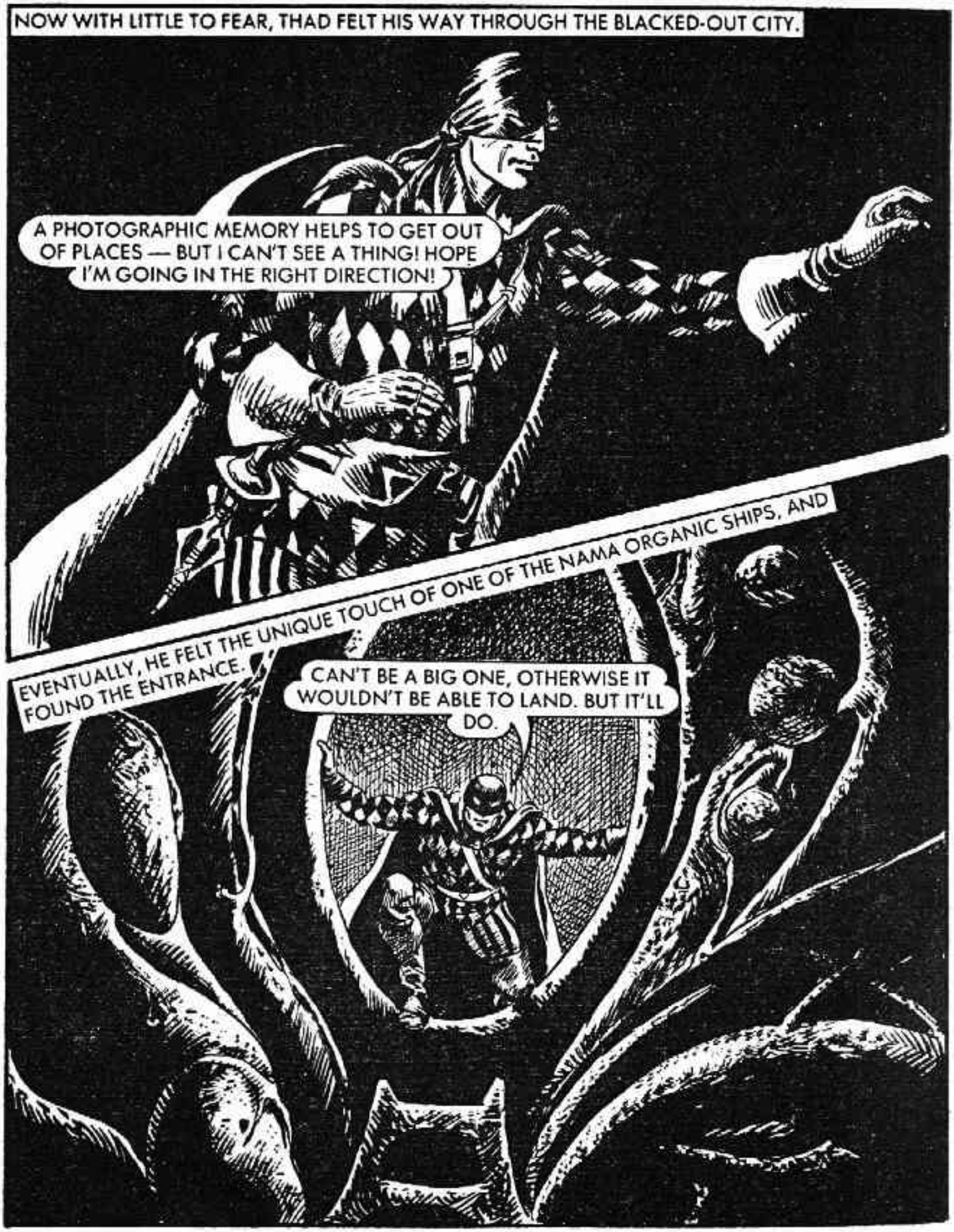
INSTANTLY, THAD'S WORN CLOTHES WERE REPLACED BY A NAMA IDEA OF WHAT A PIRATE SHOULD WEAR.
WHAT'S THIS? I LOOK LIKE A CIRCUS CLOWN!

I'LL PREPARE THE PSYCHOTRON FOR HIS MIND.
GOOD! WE'LL NOTIFY HIGH-LORD K'RYLL OF OUR ARRIVAL AND CAPTIVE.
THE THREE ALIENS LEFT, LEAVING THE PIRATE ALONE.

NOW THEY'VE GONE, I CAN START GETTING AWAY FROM HERE.
NO THICKER THAN A HUMAN HAIR, THAD REMOVED A HIDDEN CLUON TORCH FROM HIS HEAD.
THE TORCH GLOWED INTO LIFE, AND THE VERY FORCES THAT HELD ATOMS TOGETHER WERE NEUTRALISED. THE CELL WALL EVAPORATED INTO NON-EXISTENCE.
ALWAYS BEEN A USEFUL TOY, THIS.
AS THE PIRATE FLED, THE SENSORS ZEROED IN ON HIM.
I JUST HOPE THIS PHOTON MAGNET WORKS—IT DIDN'T COME WITH A MAKER'S GUARANTEE.

THE PHOTON MAGNET ABSORBED ALL THE LIGHT OVER A LARGE AREA, STORING IT AS ENERGY IN BATTERIES. TO THE SENSORS, THAD BECAME SWALLOWED IN A HUGE SPHERE OF IMPENETRABLE DARKNESS.
NOW FOR THE SPACEPORT!

AND IN THE VIEWING ROOM . . .
THIS IS THAT TERRAN'S DOING! WHERE IS HE?
I DON'T KNOW, SIR — HALF THE CITY'S INVISIBLE! HE'S PROBABLY HEADING FOR THE SPACEPORT.


NOW WITH LITTLE TO FEAR, THAD FELT HIS WAY THROUGH THE BLACKED-OUT CITY.
A PHOTOGRAPHIC MEMORY HELPS TO GET OUT OF PLACES — BUT I CAN'T SEE A THING! HOPE I'M GOING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION!
EVENTUALLY, HE FELT THE UNIQUE TOUCH OF ONE OF THE NAMA ORGANIC SHIPS, AND FOUND THE ENTRANCE.
CAN'T BE A BIG ONE, OTHERWISE IT WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO LAND. BUT IT'LL DO.

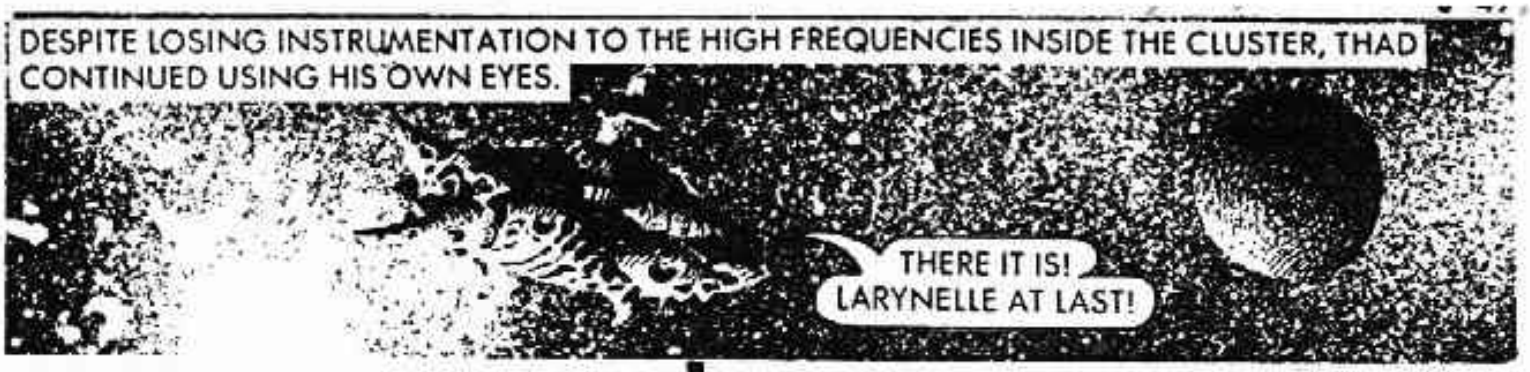
IN MOMENTS, THAD WORKED OUT ENOUGH OF THE ALIEN CONTROLS TO TAKE OFF. SHUTTING OFF THE PHOTON MAGNET, HE BLASTED AWAY FROM PHROYX.

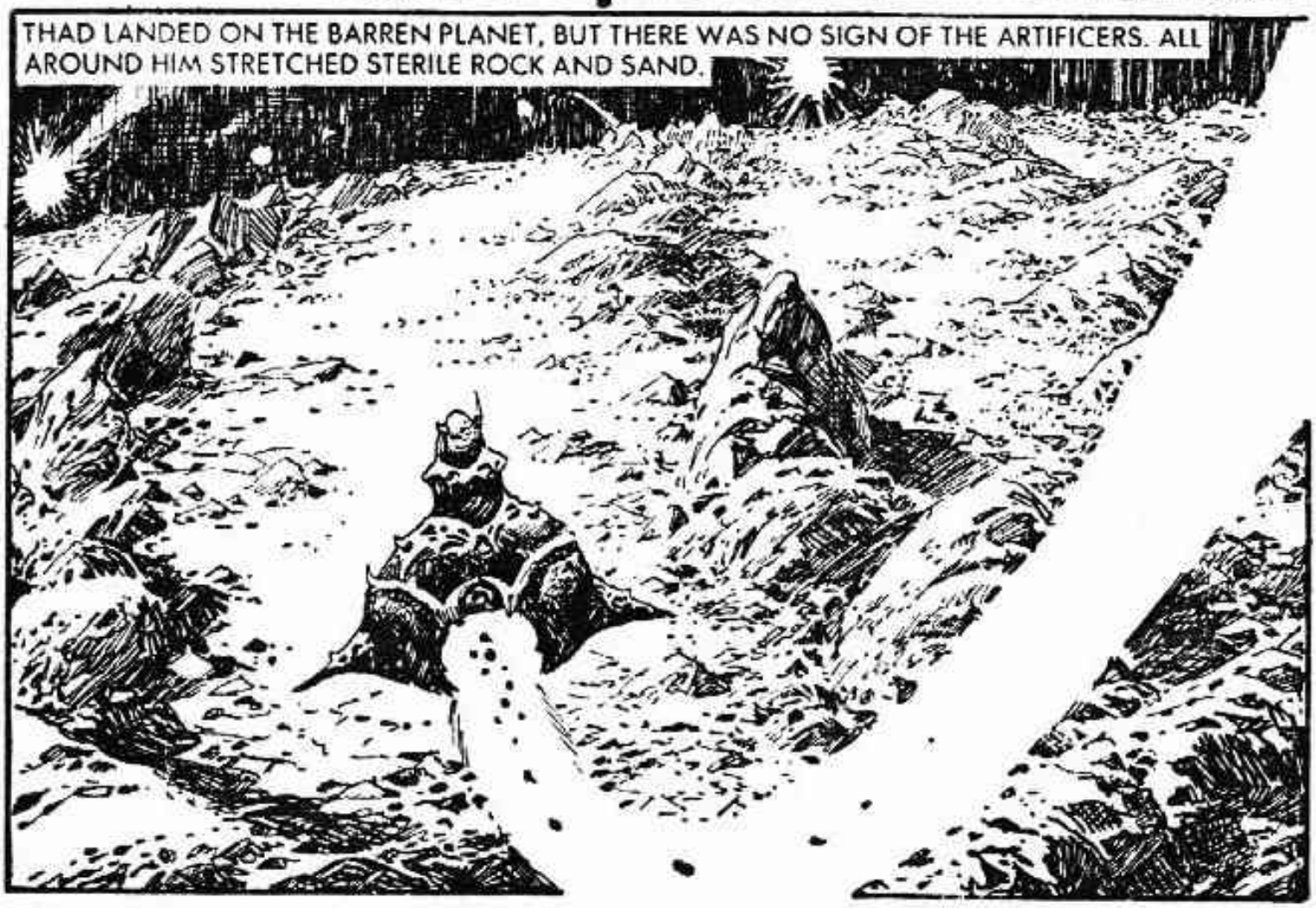
ONCE IN SPACE, THAD HAD COMPANY, AND HE HAD STILL TO UNDERSTAND ALL THE CONTROLS.

HOW IN BARAN'S NAME DO I FIRE BACK?

AND SO, RELYING ONLY ON THE SMALLER SHIP'S GREATER ACCELERATION, THAD BEGAN DODGING AND WEAVING THE ATOMIC AND NERVE BEAMS.

UNTIL FINALLY, HE MADE IT TO THE SHELTER OF THE PULSAR CLUSTER AT THE GALACTIC CENTRE.
AT LAST! TRY AND FOLLOW ME IN HERE!
WITHIN THE LEAD PURSUIT-SHIP . . .
NAVIGATOR HERE, SIR. THE TERRAN HAS VANISHED INTO THE PULSAR CLUSTER, QUADRANT VECTOR ZX49-74-81.
THEN HE KNOWS WHERE HE'S GOING—OR DOESN'T NEED INSTRUMENTS. RETURN TO PHORYX. WE'LL MOUNT A FULL VISUAL SEARCH OF THE CLUSTER.


DESPITE LOSING INSTRUMENTATION TO THE HIGH FREQUENCIES INSIDE THE CLUSTER, THAD CONTINUED USING HIS OWN EYES.
THERE IT IS! LARYNELLE AT LAST!


THAD LANDED ON THE BARREN PLANET, BUT THERE WAS NO SIGN OF THE ARTIFICERS. ALL AROUND HIM STRETCHED STERILE ROCK AND SAND.

BUT A SHORT, CAREFUL SEARCH SOON REVEALED THE TRUTH ABOUT LARYNELLE.
SO THE WHOLE PLANET'S LIKE A HUGE FACTORY. ALL THIS ROCK'S JUST FOR SHOW.

BARAN'S FLAMES, WHAT A SIGHT!
DESCENDING INTO THE PLANET, THAD FOUND THE SOURCE OF ALL THE ARTIFICERS DEVICES. WITH SENSORS RECEIVING INFORMATION ON EVERY PIECE OF TECHNOLOGY FROM ALL OVER THE GALAXY AND EITHER IMPROVING ON IT OR USING IT, THE ENTIRE PLANET WAS A STORE FOR A MILLION YEARS OF TECHNOLOGY — BUT WITH THE ARTIFICERS THEMSELVES LONG EXTINCT, LEAVING ONLY MACHINES TO CARRY ON.

IGNORING THE STARES OF THE ROBOTS, THAD DESCENDED TO THE FLOOR AND BEGAN HIS SEARCH.

NOW WHERE WOULD THEY KEEP THAT ARTIFICIAL BLACK HOLE?

SHORTLY, THAD FOUND HIS OBJECTIVE.

THE BLACK HOLE? IT MUST BE!

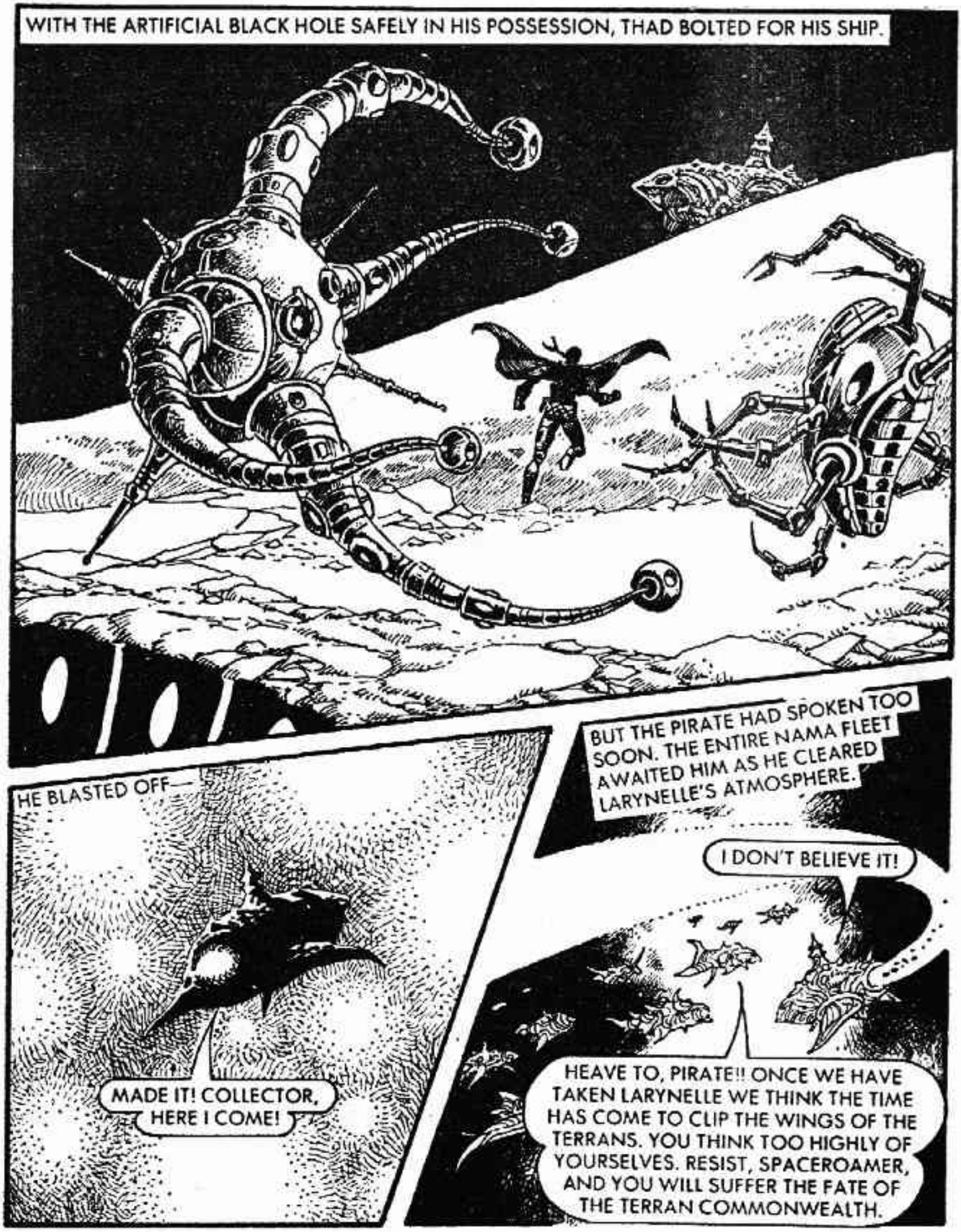
. . . AND THREE HOLOGRAPHIC OGRES IMMEDIATELY APPEARED, COVERED IN THE WEAPONS OF WAR FROM THE PAST MILLION YEARS OF THE GALAXY.
BARAN'S FLAMES!

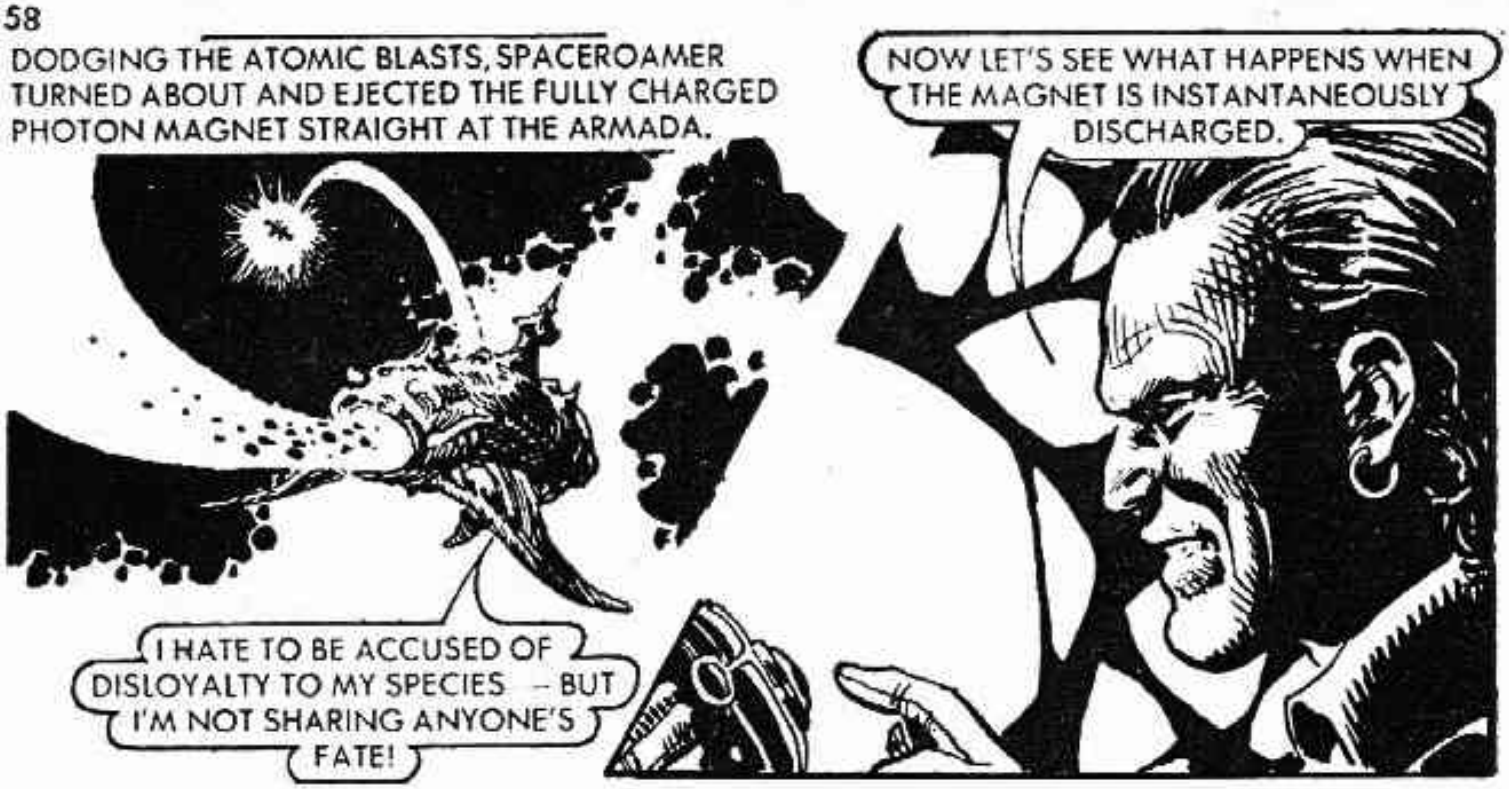
THAT PASSED STRAIGHT THROUGH! THOSE HOLOGRAPHS CAN KILL ME, BUT I CAN'T KILL THEM!
HOW CAN YOU KILL SOMETHING THAT ISN'T SOLID? THERE AIN'T NO JUSTICE!
WEAPONLESS, THAD ONCE AGAIN HAD TO FLEE RATHER THAN FIGHT.

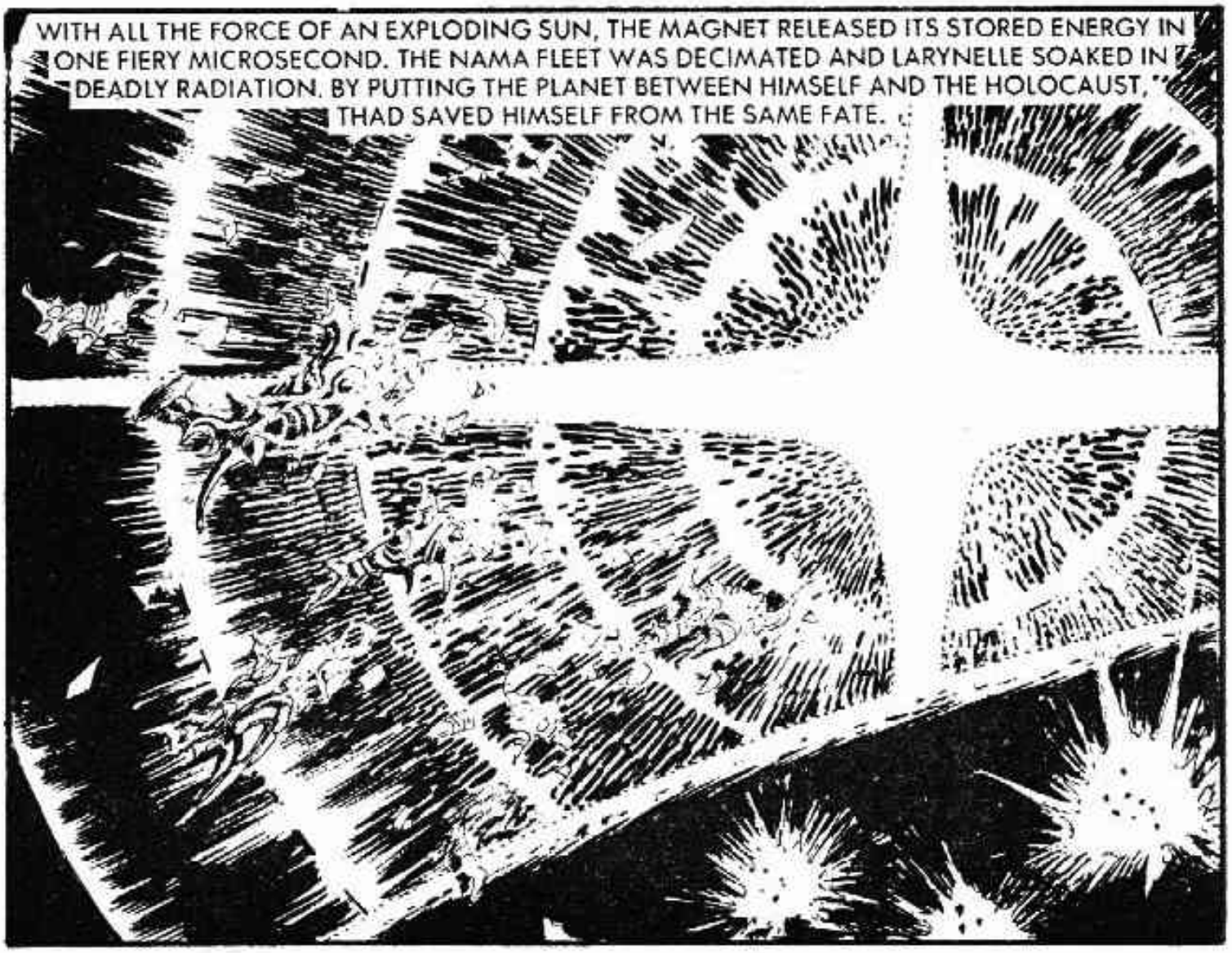
REACHING THE FACTORY FLOOR SLIGHTLY AHEAD OF HIS GIANT FOES, THAD MADE A SUDDEN DISCOVERY.
THAT BLASTED STATUE! THEY WERE ALL FACING INWARDS WHEN I GOT HERE — NOW THEY'RE ALL LOOKING AT ME! AND THAT MUST BE THE CENTRAL ONE!

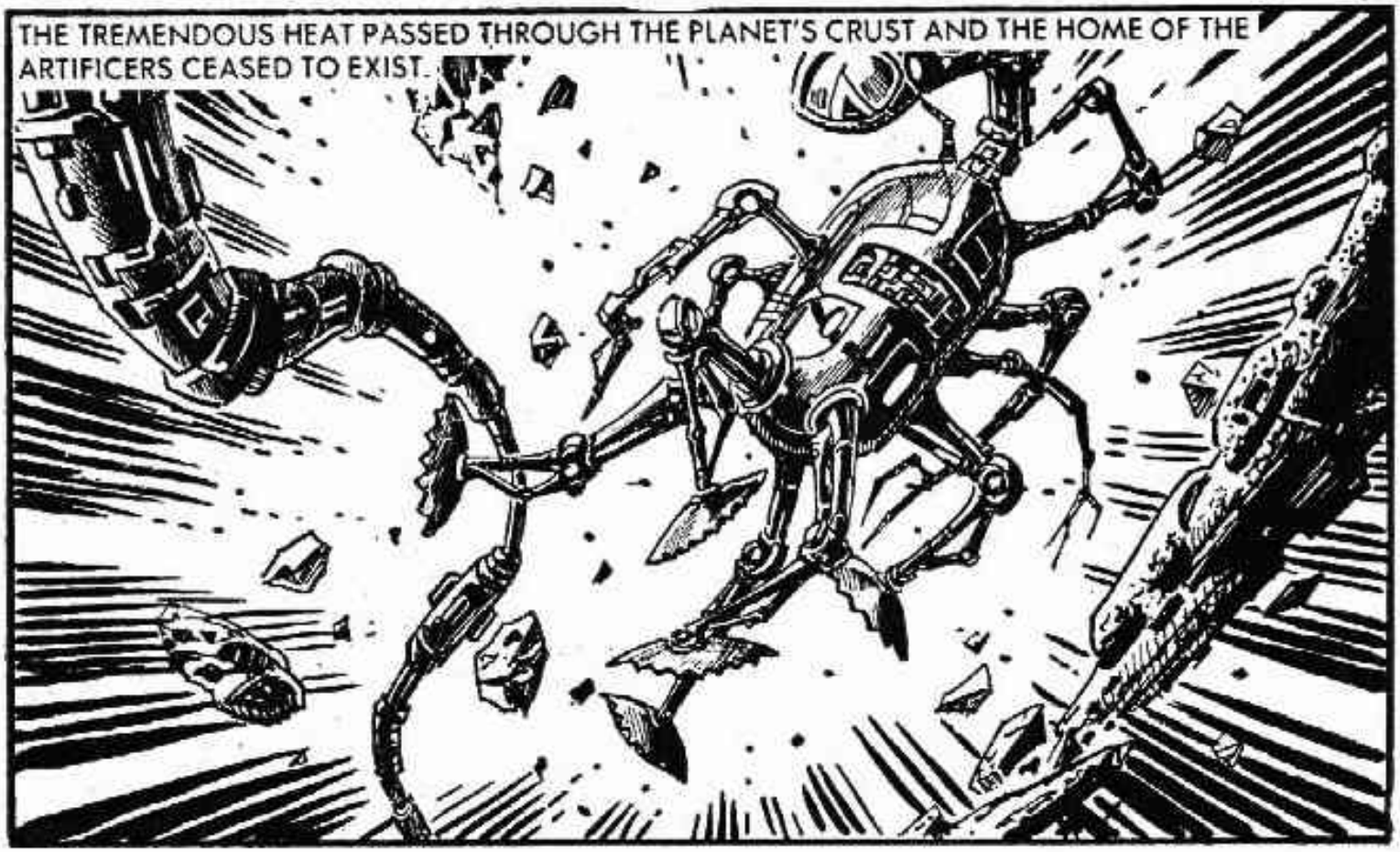
DESPITE THE HORRIBLY CLOSE SHOTS, SPACEROAMER SCALED THE STATUE, ACTIVATING ONE OF HIS MASS CONVERTERS AS HE CLIMBED.
OKAY, BABY — JUST GIVE ME A SECOND TO GET CLEAR.

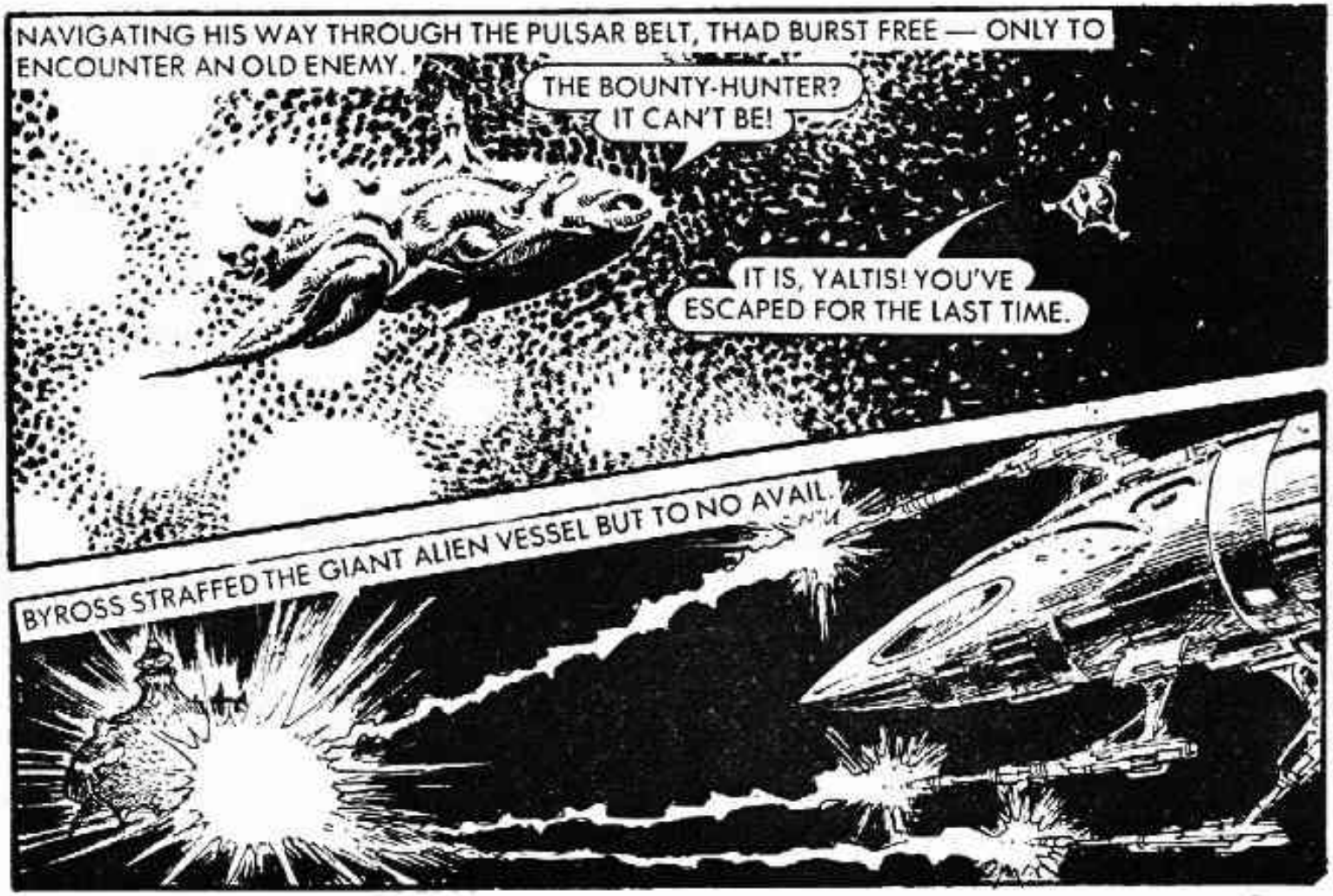
THE GIANT STATUE EXPLODED AND THE RECEPTOR BEDS FOR THE HOLOGRAPHS DEGENERATED —
HA! SCORE ONE POINT FOR ME, I THINK! NOW BACK TO THE SHIP.

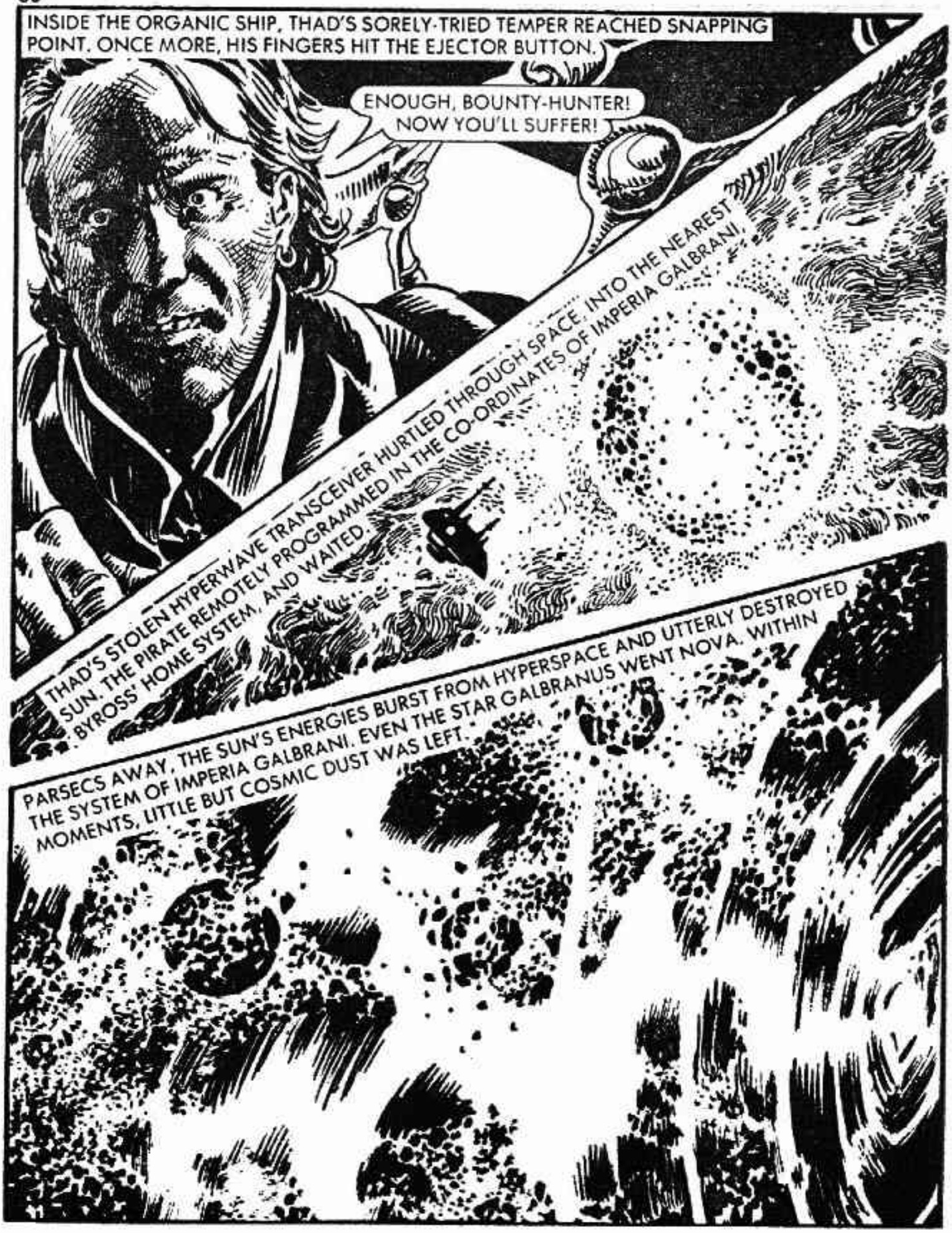

WITH THE ARTIFICIAL BLACK HOLE SAFELY IN HIS POSSESSION, THAD BOLTED FOR HIS SHIP.
HE BLASTED OFF—
MADE IT! COLLECTOR, HERE I COME!
BUT THE PIRATE HAD SPOKEN TOO SOON. THE ENTIRE NAMA FLEET AWAITED HIM AS HE CLEARED LARYNELLE'S ATMOSPHERE.
I DON'T BELIEVE IT!
HEAVE TO, PIRATE!! ONCE WE HAVE TAKEN LARYNELLE WE THINK THE TIME HAS COME TO CLIP THE WINGS OF THE TERRANS. YOU THINK TOO HIGHLY OF YOURSELVES. RESIST, SPACEROAMER, AND YOU WILL SUFFER THE FATE OF THE TERRAN COMMONWEALTH.


DODGING THE ATOMIC BLASTS, SPACEROAMER TURNED ABOUT AND EJECTED THE FULLY CHARGED PHOTON MAGNET STRAIGHT AT THE ARMADA.
NOW LET'S SEE WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE MAGNET IS INSTANTANEOUSLY DISCHARGED.
I HATE TO BE ACCUSED OF DISLOYALTY TO MY SPECIES – BUT I'M NOT SHARING ANYONE'S FATE!


WITH ALL THE FORCE OF AN EXPLODING SUN, THE MAGNET RELEASED ITS STORED ENERGY IN ONE FIERY MICROSECOND. THE NAMA FLEET WAS DECIMATED AND LARYNELLE SOAKED IN DEADLY RADIATION. BY PUTTING THE PLANET BETWEEN HIMSELF AND THE HOLOCAUST, THAD SAVED HIMSELF FROM THE SAME FATE.


THE TREMENDOUS HEAT PASSED THROUGH THE PLANET'S CRUST AND THE HOME OF THE ARTIFICERS CEASED TO EXIST.


NAVIGATING HIS WAY THROUGH THE PULSAR BELT, THAD BURST FREE — ONLY TO ENCOUNTER AN OLD ENEMY.
THE BOUNTY-HUNTER? IT CAN'T BE!
IT IS, YALTIS! YOU'VE ESCAPED FOR THE LAST TIME.
BYROSS STRAFFED THE GIANT ALIEN VESSEL BUT TO NO AVAIL.


INSIDE THE ORGANIC SHIP, THAD'S SORELY-TRIED TEMPER REACHED SNAPPING POINT. ONCE MORE, HIS FINGERS HIT THE EJECTOR BUTTON.
ENOUGH, BOUNTY-HUNTER! NOW YOU'LL SUFFER!
THAD'S STOLEN HYPERWAVE TRANSCEIVER HURTLED THROUGH SPACE, INTO THE NEAREST SUN. THE PIRATE REMOTELY PROGRAMMED IN THE CO-ORDINATES OF IMPERIA GALBRANI, BYROSS' HOME SYSTEM, AND WAITED.
PARSECS AWAY, THE SUN'S ENERGIES BURST FROM HYPERSPACE AND UTTERLY DESTROYED THE SYSTEM OF IMPERIA GALBRANI. EVEN THE STAR GALBRANUS WENT NOVA. WITHIN MOMENTS, LITTLE BUT COSMIC DUST WAS LEFT.

I HOPE YOU WERE TUNED-IN, THEN, BYROSS. I TOLD YOU YOU'D SUFFER.
YOU DEVIL! YOU INSANE, INHUMAN DEVIL! MY CRAFT SHALL REND YOU ASUNDER!
BUT EVEN HIS FINAL SUICIDAL GESTURE WAS FUTILE AGAINST THE NAMA TECHNOLOGY.
GOODBYE, BOUNTY-HUNTER.

HIS JOURNEY NO LONGER INTERRUPTED, THAD REACHED THE COLLECTOR'S HOME PLANET IN RECORD TIME.

AS PROMISED: ONE ARTIFICIAL BLACK HOLE.
THANK YOU, YALTIS. I HEAR YOU'VE BEEN BUSY: HALTING A WAR: DESTROYING MOST OF LARYNELLE, AND LEAVING THE NAMA WITHOUT A VIABLE SPACE-FLEET. I MUST CONGRATULATE YOU — I NEVER REALISED YOUR FULL POTENTIAL FOR DESTRUCTION.
EVEN AS THE COLLECTOR SPOKE, HIS SURROUNDINGS FADED AWAY, LEAVING BOTH MEN IN AN EMPTY DOME.
HEY! WHAT'S GOING ON?
A VERY SOPHISTICATED HOLOGRAPHIC TRICK. I'M AFRAID WE'VE PLAYED A LITTLE TRICK ON YOU, AND THE COMMONWEALTH IS MOST GRATEFUL.
THE COLLECTOR PULLED OFF HIS MASK, TO REVEAL THE FEATURES OF COMMANDER ROJ KALLEN OF TERRAN SECURITY.
THIS WAS THE NAMA'S GIFT FROM THE ARTIFICERS . . . ONCE IN THEIR POSSESSION WE WERE FINISHED. OUR AGENTS HAD NO HOPE OF FINDING LARYNELLE, BUT YOU DID. AS YOU'D HARDLY LEAP AT THE CHANCE TO WORK FOR US YOU HAD TO BE TRICKED.

BUT WHAT ABOUT THE TERRAN SQUADRON THAT TRIED TO CAPTURE ME? IF IT HADN'T BEEN FOR THE ARRIVAL OF THE NAMA, I'D BE YOUR PRISONER — AND YOU'D HAVE NO BLACK HOLE!
TRUE! WE LET THE NAMA CAPTURE YOU BY SECRETLY CONVINCING THEM YOU WERE MORE THAN A PIRATE. INCIDENTALLY, BYROSS WAS ASSISTED BY US. THAT MADE IT MORE LIKELY THAT YOU WOULD RETURN.

VERY SMART, KALLEN! PARDON ME IF I DON'T STAY AND APPLAUD!
THAD MADE A BREAK FOR FREEDOM THROUGH THE DOME.

AS HE RAN, A THOUGHT OCCURRED TO THE PIRATE.
THE PERSONAL TACHYONIC DRIVE UNIT! OF COURSE — ONCE I'M OUTSIDE I CAN FLY AWAY!

SO LONG, SUCKERS!
HIS FINGERS ACTIVATED THE DRIVE CONTROLS.

YOU FOOL — THE HOLOGRAPHIC RESIDUAL ENERGY CAUSES DISTORTION.

THAD STREAKED UPWARD — AS THE TACHYON UNIT ACTIVATED, BUT INSTEAD OF DEMATERIALISING HIS BODY, IT WORKED AT ONLY 50% POWER AND VIBRATED HIS MOLECULES INTO BLAZING ENERGY.
STARS ABOVE! WHAT HAPPENED?
HE MIXED TWO SETS OF ENERGY WHICH DETONATED UNDER THE STRESS OF TAKING-OFF. HE'S LIKE A SMALL SUN, NOW, OR A COMET. WHAT A WAY TO GO — HE WOULDN'T EVEN HAVE TIME TO SCREAM.

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Launched in Soyuz 12 on September 27, 1973 were Vasili G. Lazarev, 45, Air Force (right) and Oleg Grigoryevich Makarov, 40. The mission lasted 1 day 23 hrs 16 mins. On April 5, 1975 they just reached space in Soyuz 18A, a mission aborted after only nine minutes. Makarov also flew Soyuz 27 on January10, 1978 for 6 days 0 hrs 4 mins, and Soyuz T3 for 12 days 19hrs 8 mins after launch on November 27, 1979.